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ABSTRACT

Extensive change in the current educational system is needed. The major problems are: (1) Children do not relate their school experience to life experience; (2) The basic purpose, format, and curriculum of schools have not changed fundamentally since medieval times; (3) Fragmented advocacy groups and no central educational organization representing all education have diminished leadership on all fronts. Proposed solutions include: (1) Increase the level of professional competence and the number of competent professionals; (2) Form a central policy-making organization for education; (3) Improve the knowledge base for educators; (4) Improve school/community/home relations; (5) Alter curriculum to emphasize life competencies; (6) Make education a lifelong experience; and (7) Restructure roles of teachers and administrators to help children adapt to modern society. (SAS)

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AN AGENDA FOR EDUCATION FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

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THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION OF THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THE HONORABLE MR. CARL D. PERKINS, CHAIRMAN

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The most critical problems in education arise from the manner in which educational functions are related to the individual and societal needs of their clientele. This nation adopted its educational systems from Europe. Although many educators questioned whether or not the forms and rigidities of the European system were congruent with the needs of an emerging, industrial, democratic nation, the basic curriculum and expectations of the schools remained constant, and the American popular attitudes toward the school remained consistent with the elitist philosophy and objectives of their ancient European counterparts.

Seemingly, this nation cyclically becomes concerned about how well the schools are teaching the fundamentals of learning -- reading, writing, and arithmetic. This concern is almost totally non-controversial, since no one, to my knowledge, advocates not teaching these skills, and teaching these skills is precisely what the schools have done best over their entire history. That they might have difficulties in accomplishing their objectives with all students is indicative of other problems which are unresolved and to which insufficient attention has been given.

One problem in this regard is the degree to which the society at large legitimates the activities in which the schools expect children to engage. For example, children grow to maturity in our society greatly enamored of their roles either as spectators or participants in major sports. One significant reason for this is the social legitimation which surrounds sports and the hero-worship of superstars, which has been promoted by the media, not to mention the outlandish economic rewards received by young, well-advertised athletes. No academic or scholarly activities begin to approach this degree of legitimation. Until we can obtain a higher degree of legitimation than now prevails, children, to a large extent, will feel that there isn't much purpose to what they are supposed to do in school. Children are motivated to achieve in school to the

extent that they see parents and relevant others in the community engage with satisfaction in activities which relate to those in which children are required to participate in school, such as reading, and use their school learnings to attain their objectives. The parents who never read or who never read anything worth reading are most certain to have children who have reading problems in school.

The second problem area is the reinforcement which teachers and administrators obtain for school purposes from children's homes. Consciously or inadvertently, parents play a significant role in the learnings of their children. That role may have a negative or positive effect. Frustrations of parents frequently lead them to play a protective, defensive, or adversary role with the schools, in effect, defying the schools to educate their offsprings. Faced with tensions and denials over which they have little control and confronted with the numerous diversions for their young which take them away from their parents, it is easy to fall into the trap of "taking your child's part" against the teacher even when to do so is miseducating them. Even worse is parental ridicule of school learnings, which lends support to the child's observation that school learning isn't worth much in the real life of adult society.

A third problem is that of leadership. A part of the crisis in education today is the crisis in leadership in the schools. This problem takes on several dimensions. One dimension is that of the leadership which emanates from the community. We are experiencing today a fragmentation of leadership to such an extent that it is doubtful that we can actually isolate, as we could twenty-five years ago, a stable community leadership. Leadership now is a representation of specific advocacy groups and is conflictual rather than syncretic. Leadership tends to be exercised to serve the purposes of specific advocacy groups, rather than the needs and welfare either of a particular institution or of the general public. This is relfected in education through the confrontation of

diverse advocacy groups to gain control, their insistence upon selfish ends being fulfilled, their reluctance to support financial matters relating to schools unless their demands are met, and so forth. In the current situation, children are held hostage to the purposes of these groups, and there tends to be no basically organized group or lobby from the public whose major thrust is to serve their common educational interests.

The second dimension of the leadership crisis is the fragmentation of leadership and interest within the educational profession. There was a time when the National Educational Association could justifiably claim that it was the professional organization of educators. All levels of educators belonged (or could belong), and its most important efforts were to influence policies which affected the capability of educators to best serve the needs of students. Specialized interest groups were clustered about the core NEA to serve the particularistic concerns of such groups; but membership in the umbrella organization was a condition of belonging.

No longer is this the case. As NEA and its state affiliates began to transform into unions to serve the ends of classroom teachers, rather than of all education, educational groups which were presumed to have interests divergent from teachers were thrown out, leaving an hitherto universalistic organization particularly singular in its concern. The transformation of NEA's interest was well established when it ceased to support the Educational Policies Commission, which had been a voice for all education, the public interest in education, and an advocate for adaptations to improve the relevance of education to current societal and individual needs.

The result of NEA's action, abetted, to be sure, by the self-serving interests and actions of other professional organizations, was to develop leadership over particular groups serving the interests of educators rather than clientele. Almost nowhere in the country is there a specific educational

reference group solely and disinterestedly serving the needs of children and utilizing its power and resources to enhance the schools' capabilities for serving them.

A third dimension of the leadership crisis is the crisis of internal management within the schools. The unionization of teachers has separated them from principals, directors and superintendents, and the public criticism that their functionaries serve only the desires of the advocacy groups they represent has resulted in a diminution of educational leadership, an emphasis upon management of routines, and a failure of administrators to exercise leadership for the resolution of critical programmatic problems of their schools.

Beyond these factors there is an even larger and more complex problem confronting education in this country. We have specifically avoided the opportunity to come to grips with the issue of what schools are for in this and the coming generations of Americans. Schooling has changed but little in this century. To be sure, there have been many cosmetic changes in both facilities, materials and personnel. The buildings of 1900 would be obsolete in 1980, as would be the teachers and the text books. But the curriculum, graduation requirements, and the use of stubborn cliches about "learning" and the values of education have remained almost constant. Attempts have been made to stimulate change and to alter the old paradigms, but all have had little lasting or significant impact. The fundamental forms of transmission -- one teacher in front of a classroom full of students, making assignments, listening to recitations, presenting lectures, giving and grading tests, demanding discipline and following some well established courses of study -- have dominated. The demands, the rewards and penalties, the content to be mastered and the expectations to be fulfilled have had little essential transformation in spite of the enormous technological changes and demands which have altered American society.

Looked at as a whole, these factors -- legitimation, reinforcement, leadership, and purpose and function -- constitute the bases for the crises which confront education today and which must be resolved in the 1980's and beyond if schooling as a meaningful public venture is to prevail.

As we look forward to the Twenty-first Century, it is apparent that schools will be either what they currently are or what we allow and make them to become. Although there are those who would like to forecast the nature and characteristics of schooling, it would seem to be a more fruitful endeavor to think through the manner in which the intelligence and resources of the nation can be mobilized to create the patterns of schooling and education in general which will best serve the interests of children and the American public.

It cannot be overlooked that education does constitute a vast bureaucratic enterprise affected by the interests of diverse reference groups. The structure of education is not isolated from the main currents of American society, and educators are not immune to the changing ethos of Americans. They have a propietary interest in maintaining the schools as they now are, irregardless of the functions which the schools should serve. They do constitute a group of human beings who have varying levels of tolerance for change and adaptation and differential motivations for wanting to see either the maintenance of the status quo or the facilitation of change. No bureaucracy or profession moves easily, and it is too much to expect that, unlike some other professions or special interest groups, educators will readily discommode themselves to accept new ways in which they conduct their professional services. Nevertheless, I believe that there are some imperatives with which we must be concerned and to which the Congress of the United States should give careful consideration in establishing any long-range legislative programs.

I believe that the first imperative is to build within this nation the professional competence to deal with educational problems so that education can

be adapted to current and future societal and clientele needs. Education in this country has always been plagued by a "know nothing" perspective relative to governance and leadership. Probably one of the basic reasons for the current dilemma is that knowledge and expertise in education has been discounted, and those coming from arenas which have special axes to grind promote and defend the assumption that the less one knows about the technology of education, the better are the decisions about program, governance and direction that can be made. Education, like medicine, has a knowledge base which is essential as the foundation upon which relevant, meaningful and appropriate decisions can be made. Problems of education are too complex to leave to the ignorant and the ill-tutored or poorly trained professionals to resolve. The mobilization, retraining, and improvement of professional competence to deal on as high a level of scientific capability as possible with the problems confronting the renovation of education is the nation's number one need if we are ever to develop an educational system appropriate to the developmental requirements of our children and youth.

Second, at the same time that this nation is building a higher level of professional competence, it should also help the public realistically to formulate a perspective of what the schools can and should do for American society in the Twenty-first Century. In spite of the current trend toward having all decisions made on the basis of some form of consensus, it would seem to be far better to establish a committee composed of highly knowledgeable laymen and very broadly educated and competent professionals who can constitute a panel which constantly identifies the most critical, societal and human concerns with which education should deal as it prepares to meet the challenges of the Twenty-first Century. That is the function which the old Educational Policies Commission performed, and its demise has left this nation without an agency that can chart direction and disinterestedly and objectively identify

the most critical issues and developmental concerns upon which the schools should be embarking. Just as the public interest could scarcely be represented without local boards of education, without an objective and public spirited national policy-recommending body, on the national scene decisions about education are frequently made without an established public accountability.

Third, the American public must face the reality that our school system must be based either solidly upon knowledge about teaching and learning or continue to operate upon the basis of myths, rules of thumb and half-truths which arise out of the vagaries of personal experience. The revolution in medical science which took place in the early part of the Twentieth Century would never have occurred had there not been an emerging body of scientific knowledge to guide medical practitioners in rendering the most competent and appropriate medical service. Unless we have an improvement of the knowledge base upon which educational practice is founded, children will be abandoned to the whims of practitioners, each of whom has his own ready bag of nostrums which result in more satisfactions to the practitioner than accomplishments for the learner. It is imperative that this nation build a stronger, broader and more fundamental capability in research in education and related disciplines which can, then, be expertly developed into new models and strategies of teaching to promote learning.

Fourth, one of the barriers to the effectiveness of institutionalized education is its divorcement from the home. The independence of the school from all other agencies of the community has resulted in its becoming a haven for children, separated from the community and particularly the home, and to a large extent governed without respect for the heritage of the homes from which the children come. To achieve higher levels of effectiveness, the school must be associated with the family, and areas of congruence between family and school and their unique objectives and values must be achieved. A strong

and family life education to enable greater reinforcement of legitimated learnings to take place.

Fifth, along with the effort to bring greater congruence both of understanding and efforts to educate children between family and school must also be the endeavor of the school to make use of the educational opportunities provided by the community-at-large. Remarkable efforts have been made in recent years to develop a science of experiential learning in which the instructional capabilities of the community far beyond the ability of school districts to pay for those resources has been achieved. The great value in experiential learning lies in the fact that it helps children become involved in the life of the community at the same time that they are gaining the knowledge and skills necessary for more effective participation. Experiential learning appears to be most effective in areas related to civic, aesthetic, avocational and vocational development.

Sixth, only modest accomplishments have been made in renovating the curriculum, the basic foundations of which were established in medieval times. A long history of endeavors to adapt the curriculum to the needs of contemporary society and of the individuals growing to maturity within it have met with little success because the school has been dominated by an academic tradition which has been elitist, based essentially upon cognitive development appropriate for that narrow band of citizens who have high conceptualizing capabilities, and unrelated to the real life activities and needs of the majority of the people. The tradition of excellence in schools is academic excellence and is unrelated to excellence in those areas of concern which make this nation totally effective in the accomplishment of its objectives. As John Gardner warned years ago, the society that prizes excellence in philosophy but neglects excellence in plumbing will have neither excellent philosophers nor adequate plumbers. The result will be "neither its philosophies nor its pipes will hold water."

In recent years there have been many promising new patterns suggested for the remaking of the curriculum to meet the needs of the total population, rather than the academic elite alone. There has been very little effort on the part of the Federal Government to explore these promising leads and to assist in determining the degree to which they can be perfected as means for the renovation and improvement of the educational enterprise. Some of these leads include the concepts of career education, the whole range of life role competencies, values education, new perspectives on how to build a curriculum based upon the work ethic and ideological heritage of Americans, the concepts of global education, and so forth. All of these are related to the basic needs of our society as it looks into the future as the great nation of our democratic heritage. Without federal assistance and resources fully to explore and to develop these concepts, whether or not they will have the kind of promise and hope that is needed, will never be known.

Seventh, the changing characteristics of the American population and our economic and social needs necessitate a concern about education on a life long basis, rather than merely throughout the immature years. Lifelong education has never been fully conceptualized as a means for maintaining effectiveness, motivation and direction among all of the population at different stages of their lives. Too much of the concern for lifelong education has been the continuing education perspective which has placed emphasis upon the taking of courses for credit rather than adapting learning activities to the life changes of our citizenry. With the increasing age of our population and the acceleration of technological changes, new demands are placed upon the population for making changes in perspective and acquiring new skills and understandings to maintain their ability to earn a living and to maintain a healthy perspective on their life and roles in society. Preparation for new vocational endeavors, building better understanding of current changes in living, understanding the nature of the nation's responsibilities within the family of nations, developing

an understanding of the multi-ethnicity of American society, understanding and being able to participate in the arts, religion, recreational and avocational activities which are building health in body and mind in preparation for retirement so as to maintain human fulfillment during those difficult periods of life -- all are the functions of lifelong education and must be developed within the framework of our heritage for helping, as a nation, each individual maintain levels of fulfillment and effectiveness in order to keep a totally viable society.

Eighth, there is probably nothing more crucial which needs to be accomplished than the careful analysis and restructuring of the roles of teachers and administrators. These roles developed at times when not only the schools but societal expectations were more simplistic than is now the case. These roles were developed when it appeared that the function of the teacher was primarily to maintain order over a group of children, and the primary function of the principal was to manage routines, maintain discipline and mete out punishment for those who misbehaved. The roles today are made complex by the multitude of expectations which have descended upon the schools and the need for teachers to be prepared to diagnose and prescribe for the individual needs of children from all segments of society. The principal, on the other hand, must not only be an administrator in a complex organization, but he must also be the leader for interpreting educational needs both to the public and the school's staff. With the advent of unionism, it has been easy to fall into the ruts of allowing all relationships to become governed by terms of the contract between bargaining parties. But the children have not been a party to the contract formation, and educational values relating to their needs have suffered. One would not want to obliterate the gains which have been made in the teaching profession, but it is apparent that new ways of defining administrative and teaching roles must be found if the educational welfare of students is to be fully protected.

I do not believe there are easy solutions for the complex educational problems which beset us. There is danger that none of the issues which need to be resolved will be resolved on the basis of the best knowledge and in the most objective fashion possible unless effort is made to do so. We can tackle these problems with professional and civic integrity if we wish to make the effort to do so, and in this way hope to shape the educational enterprise of the next century to our design and in our children's and the general population's best interests. The alternative will be a more politically divisive, fragmented and less effective educational system than we have today.